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FOURTH ITEM ON THE AGENDA

The post-2015 sustainable development agenda

Purpose of the document

The Governing Body is invited to recommend the tripartite constituents, and to request the Director-General, to support a six-point strategy for further work on a post-2015 sustainable development framework (see the draft decision in paragraph 24).

Relevant strategic objective: All.

Policy implications: Yes.

Legal implications: No.

Financial implications: No.

Follow-up action required: Yes.

Author unit: Multilateral Cooperation Department (MULTILATERALS).

Related documents: GB.319/POL/7; GB.319/INS/3/1; GB.319/INS/3/2.

Introduction

1. This paper provides an update on and reviews the main concerns and priorities that are emerging from the post-2015 reflection; it reports on the progress made in the intergovernmental discussion on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); and introduces the preliminary proposals for a new set of global goals that have been made so far. ¹ The paper also highlights the role played by the tripartite constituents and the Office throughout the whole process, and suggests a strategy for the Organization through to the final stages of negotiating a post-2015 framework.

An extensive global reflection

2. The process of national, regional and global thematic consultations initiated by the United Nations (UN) to support member States in formulating a global development framework beyond 2015 is extensive in its scope and content. It has engaged nearly 1 million people from countries in all regions, including representatives of employers and unions. Better job opportunities were among the top priorities for the new agenda identified in the UN's MY World 2015 global survey, together with education, health care, an honest and responsive government, and water and sanitation. ² Job creation also emerged as a pressing need in nearly all the countries where the UN held national consultations and it was among the key priorities identified by the UN Regional Commissions. ³
3. The consultations touched upon issues of universality, transformation, participation, accountability and monitoring of the future agenda. The outcomes of this "global conversation" have provided an input into the report of the UN Secretary-General for the special event of the President of the UN General Assembly on 25 September 2013 to follow up efforts made towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and to discuss the future development framework.
4. The Secretary-General's report – entitled "A life of dignity for all: Accelerating progress towards the Millennium Development Goals and advancing the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015" – provides an assessment of the progress made to date and identifies policies and programmes that have led to success in achieving the MDGs and that can contribute to accelerating it. ⁴ These include emphasizing inclusive growth, decent employment and social protection; allocating more resources to essential services and ensuring access for all; strengthening political will and improving the international policy environment; and harnessing the power of multi-stakeholder partnerships.
5. The Secretary-General suggests that a new post-2015 era demands a new vision and a responsive framework. He sees sustainable development – enabled by the integration of economic growth, social justice and environmental stewardship – as a global guiding principle and operational standard. He stresses that this universal agenda requires profound economic transformations and a new global partnership. The prominence accorded to the promotion of "inclusive and sustainable growth and decent employment" as part of

¹ See GB.317/WP/SDG/1 and GB.316/INS/6 for previous reports.

² Nearly 800,000 individuals from 194 countries participated in the survey via Internet, mobile phones and in-person surveys; for the results, see <http://www.myworld2015.org/?page=results>.

³ www.regionalcommissions.org/post2015regionalreport.pdf.

⁴ UN A/68/202. <http://www.un.org/Docs/journal/asp/ws.asp?m=A/68/202>.

“transformative and mutually reinforcing actions that apply to all countries” in the Secretary-General’s report is, in part, a reflection of the ILO’s advocacy of the centrality of decent work to sustainable development.

6. The special event is expected to lead to the adoption of a resolution proposing modalities for the preparation of the new framework by the end of 2015. Once UN member States begin negotiations on the new framework, probably in the latter part of 2014, they are likely to draw on the ideas generated by the consultation process and synthesized in the Secretary-General’s report. This process is different from the one that led to the launch of the MDGs, and the new framework could command important broad-based support and ownership as a result.
7. The ILO and its tripartite constituents contributed to the round of consultations in many contexts. The Office led the thematic discussion on growth and employment, underlining issues concerning job quality and social protection and opening up the debate on policies and means of implementation. In June 2013, an ILO–UNDP expert meeting was held in New York in which the social partners participated. The meeting highlighted the need for an ambitious employment goal in the post-2015 agenda.⁵ Contributions were also made to the thematic consultations on inequalities, governance, education, and population dynamics. A second ILO post-2015 development agenda concept note entitled “Jobs and livelihoods in the post-2015 development agenda: Meaningful ways to set targets and monitor progress” was released and disseminated, helping to lay the ground for the burgeoning discussion on concrete goals, targets and indicators.⁶
8. ILO field offices engaged in the national and regional consultations and facilitated the involvement of constituents. Office support to the participation of the social partners was important in better reflecting the issues concerning the world of work in a discussion that stimulated the large-scale participation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other civil society groups. On the initiative of the ILO Bureau for Workers’ Activities (ACTRAV), a Trade Union Meeting of Experts on the Post-2015 Development Agenda was held in Geneva in May 2013 to collect the views of over 50 trade union leaders from 30 countries.⁷ The Office is also supporting the participation of representatives of workers and employers in several post-2015 expert meetings and events, for instance the meeting on “Applying a gender perspective to the post-2015 development framework and the Sustainable Development Goals”, run by UN Women in November 2012.⁸

Accelerating progress towards the MDGs: ILO contribution

Alongside the reflection on a post-2015 framework, the UN and the World Bank are leading a major effort to accelerate progress towards the MDGs in the period up to 2015. The ILO is contributing to initiatives in **Ghana, Niger** and the **United Republic of Tanzania**. Under MDG 1: “eradicate extreme poverty and hunger”, the ILO’s support to the **United Republic of Tanzania** centres on enterprise creation and cooperatives, and the improvement of job opportunities, training, and access to micro-financing and business development services. In **Ghana**, the focus is on MDG 5: “improve maternal health”, by enhancing maternity protection, while contributing to progress towards MDG 6: “combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases” (particularly the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV) through improved access to health education and care via

⁵ http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/media-centre/press-releases/WCMS_216395/lang--en/index.htm; <http://www.iisd.ca/post2015/employment/>.

⁶ http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/post-2015/documents/WCMS_213209/lang--en/index.htm.

⁷ http://www.ilo.org/actrav/WCMS_218195/lang--en/index.htm.

⁸ <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2012/11/un-women-convenes-expert-consultations-on-gender-and-the-post-2015-agenda>.

the workplace. Improvements in working conditions for pregnant women and nursing mothers are envisaged. With respect to MDG 1, **Niger** is receiving support to develop a national social protection floor and to boost employment-intensive infrastructural activities, with a view to reducing poverty and unemployment among vulnerable groups, including in rural communities. A National Social Protection Forum is planned for November 2013. In general, the ILO's work is grounded in international labour instruments and social dialogue, and aims to reinforce national capacity to sustain these initiatives up to and beyond 2015.

The intergovernmental process to define the SDGs

9. Set up on the basis of the conclusions of Rio +20, the UN General Assembly's Open Working Group (OWG) on SDGs was tasked with defining a set of global goals to be submitted to the UN General Assembly. The Group has 30 rotating seats representing 70 UN member States. It started its work in March 2013 and it is currently at the stage of "listening" to thematic issues, which will continue until February 2014. So far, it has held four sessions.⁹
10. The fourth session of the OWG took place in New York in June 2013 and addressed the topics of employment and decent work for all, social protection, youth, education, culture, health and population dynamics. The session was opened by a keynote address by the ILO Deputy Director-General for Management and Reform, emphasizing the critical role of decent and productive work in achieving sustainable development.¹⁰ During the discussion, several governments mentioned the issue of a stand-alone employment goal. Several ILO concerns were reflected in the final conclusions: the global priority of tackling youth unemployment; the question of low-productivity informal jobs; the importance of resilient and diversified economies; the need for a policy environment conducive to private investment and entrepreneurship; and the creation of country-specific social protection floors.
11. Overall, support is emerging within the OWG for a single post-2015 UN development framework containing a set of goals that are universally applicable but adaptable to national priorities, with poverty eradication as the overarching objective, and the main emphasis on balancing all three dimensions of sustainable development in a holistic way. In future meetings, the OWG will look at means of implementation and resources along with concrete goal proposals. It will start drafting its report with its final recommendations in March 2014, to be submitted to the UN General Assembly in September 2014.

Main contours of the post-2015 debate

12. Outside the intergovernmental process, proposals for new sets of global goals are flooding in from governments, civil society, academic think tanks, business groups and trade unions. The SDG e-Inventory by the Stakeholder Forum lists over 70 proposals in the areas of poverty eradication and sustainable development, with employment and labour as the

⁹ <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?menu=1549>.

¹⁰ http://www.ilo.org/newyork/news/WCMS_216536/lang--en/index.htm; the Office also coordinated the preparation of the UN Issues Briefs to inform the OWG discussions on Employment and Decent Work and Social Protection respectively, see: <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/18331106tstissuesemploywork.pdf> and <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/18320406tstissuesocprot.pdf>.

most cited themes, followed by gender equality, human rights and social protection.¹¹ The Future Goals Tracker by the Overseas Development Institute (about 150 proposals) reveals a similar pattern, the main thematic priorities being sustainable development; employment and linked productive and economic factors; water and sanitation; and food security and health.¹²

13. An articulated and influential contribution is the report entitled “A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development” by the UN High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda appointed by the UN Secretary-General. The report calls for major economic and institutional shifts; a new global partnership and a “data revolution” for monitoring progress and strengthening accountability. It recommends a focus on transforming economies for jobs and inclusive growth as one of the main pillars of the future agenda, and it proposes candidate goal 8 (out of 12): “Create jobs, sustainable livelihoods and equitable growth”. The report also recommends a target on social protection under candidate goal 1: “End poverty”.¹³
14. The report was both welcomed and criticized. At the 2013 General Segment of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), held in Geneva (18–26 July 2013), some delegations said that global governance issues had not been adequately addressed (e.g. trade, environment, economic relations, migration and financing for development). Others appreciated the focus on a transformative framework illustrated by possible goals. The reaction of the International Trade Union Confederation was that the report was insufficiently ambitious on poverty eradication and could have made greater use of the four dimensions of decent work in its recommendation on employment.
15. Another prominent proposal is the Action Agenda for Sustainable Development formulated by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) led by Mr Jeffrey Sachs. It suggests a set of ten universal goals, some of which have employment as a target. For instance, bringing youth unemployment to below 10 per cent is a target under candidate goal 3 on education and learning, while rural and urban employment are referred to as targets under goal 6 on agriculture and goal 7 on inclusive, productive and resilient cities respectively.¹⁴
16. Several other proposals similarly put employment and decent work alongside other targets as a way of fostering an integrated approach to achieving one higher-order goal such as poverty eradication, human development or inclusive growth. For instance, the UN Global Compact suggests the target of creating jobs through decent work under candidate goal 1: “End poverty and increase prosperity via inclusive economic growth”.¹⁵ The UN Women

¹¹ <http://www.sustainabledevelopment2015.org/index.php/blog2/item/284-initial-stocktaking-analysis-of-the-sdgs-e-inventory-visions-for-global-goals>.

¹² <http://post2015.org/2013/05/16/what-do-we-know-about-the-worlds-proposals-for-post-2015-goals-first-analysis-from-the-future-goals-tracker/>.

¹³ See <http://www.post2015hlp.org/the-report/>.

¹⁴ <http://unsdsn.org/files/2013/06/130613-SDSN-An-Action-Agenda-for-Sustainable-Development-FINAL.pdf>.

¹⁵ “Corporate Sustainability and the United Nations post-2015 Development Agenda” at http://www.unglobalcompact.org/issues/partnerships/post_2015_development_agenda.html.

proposal for a stand-alone goal on “achieving gender equality, women’s rights and women’s empowerment” also has the target of promoting “decent work for women”.¹⁶

- 17.** The UN Secretary-General’s report, which will be the main background report for the UN special event in September 2013, identifies encouraging common ground in the findings of the consultation processes and the special reports. It suggests that “the key elements of the emerging vision for the development agenda beyond 2015 include:
- (a) universality, to mobilize all developed and developing countries and leave no one behind;
 - (b) sustainable development, to tackle the interlinked challenges facing the world, including a clear focus on ending extreme poverty in all its forms;
 - (c) inclusive economic transformations ensuring decent jobs, backed by sustainable technologies, to shift to sustainable patterns of consumption and production;
 - (d) peace and governance, as key outcomes and enablers of development;
 - (e) a new global partnership, recognizing shared interests, different needs and mutual responsibilities, to ensure commitment to and means of implementing the new vision; and
 - (f) being “fit for purpose”, to ensure that the international community is equipped with the right institutions and tools for addressing the challenges of implementing the sustainable development agenda at the national level.” (paragraph 81).
- 18.** To bring this vision to life, 14 “transformative and mutually reinforcing actions” are detailed in the report (paragraphs 83–96), including the eradication of poverty in all its forms; tackling exclusion and inequality; empowering women and girls; providing quality education and lifelong learning; promoting inclusive and sustainable growth and decent employment; and building peace and effective governance based on the rule of law and sound institutions.

Main issues and next steps

- 19.** To sum up, there appears to be convergence around the notion of a single and balanced set of goals, limited in number, universal to all nations but responsive to the specificities of each country, with the greatest emphasis on eradicating poverty and integrating sustainable development in its economic, social and environmental dimensions. Great attention is also paid to monitoring and accountability via a major investment in the availability and quality of data. The key challenge will be to agree on a clear “transformative” framework within which a manageable number of themes can be organized and prioritized. In other words, the global goals should not just be discrete “achievable proxies” that are time-bound and easy to communicate, but should act as leverage points to successfully drive a deeper process of transformation toward sustainable development.
- 20.** ILO issues have emerged prominently in the post-2015 consultations and the wider public debate on the future agenda. In a large number of countries, the general public has expressed a demand for job opportunities and dignity at work while experts have

¹⁶ Other examples include the World Bank, the NGO Save the Children and the so-called “Bellagio goals” proposed by the Centre for International Governance Innovation and the Korean Development Institute.

underlined the transformative value of goals on employment and decent work. Nevertheless, some of the proposals for new sets of global goals tend to treat employment and decent work as targets associated with goals like “eradicate poverty” or “inclusive growth”.

21. The process has only just begun and the outcome of the intergovernmental negotiation is hard to predict. As it proceeds, it can be anticipated that the debate is going to become more political and complex. Ultimately, negotiating positions are likely to be heavily influenced by convincing proposals for simple and concrete goals, targets and indicators. The capacity to mobilize support and develop compelling evidence-based arguments is likely to help make a difference in the final outcome. Already it can be anticipated that the debate and any new framework will significantly change the way in which development cooperation is organized and financed, with important implications for the ILO.¹⁷
22. There is a long road ahead: after the initial discussion held in September 2013, on which an oral report will be presented to the Governing Body, there will be a series of preparatory events in the UN General Assembly during 2014; the intergovernmental negotiations will most likely be formally launched in September 2014; a synthesis report by the UN Secretary-General on all inputs into the post-2015 process will be presented by the end of 2014; and a Summit of Heads of State and Governments will take place in September 2015 for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda.
23. A six-point strategy for further ILO work on a post-2015 sustainable development framework is proposed that reflects the inputs of the tripartite constituents:¹⁸
 - (a) Tripartite constituents and the Office should make every effort to accelerate progress towards achieving the current MDGs in the period up to 2015.
 - (b) Tripartite constituents and the Office should remain active in highlighting the significance of full employment and decent work, including social protection, in achieving sustainable development right through to the final stages of the negotiation of a new framework.
 - (c) Ministries of Employment, Labour and Social Affairs should be closely involved in defining negotiating positions regarding the post-2015 development agenda in capitals and regional institutions. Throughout such processes, the social partners should be closely consulted.
 - (d) ILO advocacy should include a structured communication strategy to influence opinion makers, think tanks and the media. It should draw on outreach to new and long-standing external partners, including parliamentarians, academic networks and NGOs. Supporting material for use in advocacy should include UN reports to and resolutions of the General Assembly and ECOSOC, together with other official material generated by the UN systems, as well as the social partners. Linkages with the conclusions on sustainable development, decent work and green jobs adopted by

¹⁷ GB.319/POL/8.

¹⁸ This action will also be pertinent to the “End of Poverty Initiative,” one of the seven centenary initiatives proposed in the Director-General’s report to the International Labour Conference in June 2013 and taken up in document GB.319/INS/3/1.

the International Labour Conference at its 102nd Session in June 2013, and the resulting strategic action plan will be especially useful.¹⁹

- (e) The Office will continue to follow closely and contribute to UN system inputs into the process, including the preparation of UN Issues Briefs for the UN General Assembly's OWG on SDGs on relevant topics, and engagement in relevant UN country, regional and global initiatives.
- (f) Office research and analysis, including further concept papers, will provide supporting information and evidence. Efforts should encompass research and reviews of linkages between employment and decent work and issues of inclusive growth, sustainable development and poverty alleviation, including social protection floors. Preparing the Office for a "data revolution" in the collection and analysis of labour market statistics will also be important.

Draft decision

24. The Governing Body:

- (a) recommends the tripartite constituents, and requests the Director-General, to give effect to the six-point strategy for further work on a post-2015 sustainable development framework found in paragraph 23; and*
- (b) requests to review progress on this matter regularly.*

¹⁹ GB.319/INS/3/2.